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Ouachita students recognized at American Chemical Society National Meeting



By Taylor Tomlinson

March 24, 2014

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ARKADELPHIA, Ark. -- Six students from Ouachita Baptist University earned the "Speak Simply" award in the Undergraduate Research Poster Contest at the American Chemical Society (ACS) National Meeting in Dallas March 17. A total of 13 students from the J.D. Patterson School of Natural Sciences presented their work.

"Our students' strong communications skills and passion for research are a strong testament to their own individual talents as well as the collective efforts of all Ouachita faculty who mentor and instruct them," said Dr. Tim Knight, dean of OBU's Patterson School.

"At least 1,000 undergraduates made research presentations on their individual projects at the spring meeting. ... The contest only recognized 15 students total out of all the students presenting," said Dr. Marty Perry, OBU's Nell I. Mondy Professor of Chemistry. "Ouachita students earned six of these awards and have now earned 10 of the 30 awards during the past two years."

Students who presented in the “Speak Simply” division were given two minutes to explain the importance of their individual research projects. They were required to summarize their research simply and free of technical jargon.

“The ‘Speak Simply’ contest encourages students to convey their research in a way that anyone could understand it,” said Mallory Burroughs, a junior biology major from Hot Springs, Ark. “Sometimes we get lost in the technical lingo and forget to explain the big idea relating to our research.”

Burroughs conducted her research under Perry’s supervision, using computational chemistry to simulate drugs being metabolized. Burroughs said this type of research “generates ideas toward enhancing the way drugs are put out onto the market and the further understanding of the proteins in our body that are responsible for metabolizing these drugs.”

“For a school of our size to go and have such great success at an event of this magnitude shows the dedication that the students and professors have to perform at high levels both in and out of the classroom,” said Pete Brunson, a senior biology major from Monticello, Ark.

Brunson said his research concerned “fluorescence spectroscopy as a method to measure the concentration of BPA in water exposed to thermal receipt paper.” His research was conducted this past summer on Ouachita’s campus with Dr. Sara Hubbard, assistant professor of chemistry.

“The contest forces you to put yourself in the shoes of your peers and practice communicating with them,” added Kelsey Willis, a senior chemistry and biology major from Redfield, Ark. This is the second year Willis has earned a “Speak Simply” award. She also serves as president of Ouachita’s ACS chapter. “I am proud that I have placed each year. Winning the award is important to me personally because even as a professional, I want to retain the ability to communicate with people of all walks of life.”

Willis’ research characterized 26 strains of *staph aureus* in an effort to further data for preventative treatment for Toxic Shock Syndrome. She completed her research with Dr. Mark Hart at the National Center for Toxicological Research in Jefferson, Ark.

In addition to Burroughs, Brunson and Willis, other Ouachita students who received “Speak Simply” awards include: Tim Horton, a senior professional chemistry and physics major from Arkadelphia, Ark.; Jessie Meyer, a senior biology major from Woodway, Texas; and Jason Stevenson, a senior biology and chemistry major from Guy, Ark.

The ACS National Meeting is a semi-annual conference that attracts approximately 15,000 academia, industry and government participants from across the nation. In addition to the undergraduate presentations, the meeting hosts a variety of other events, including lectures, workshops and exhibits.

“The opportunity for them to share and network with peers and experienced scientists in the profession is extremely valuable,” said Perry. “Communication and critical thinking skills are enhanced as a result of participation in the meeting. They also see that the profession is much larger than our small corner of the world.”

“I had the privilege of discussing an application of my research that I had not previously considered with a scientist from Puerto Rico,” added Willis. “After our discussion, he was so intrigued that he asked for my mentor’s contact information so that he could further discuss my the research with him. Connections like these would not be possible without attending meetings and sharing our knowledge.”

Other Ouachita students who presented their research at the meeting include Sarah Bishop, a senior chemistry and biology major from Paron, Ark.; Trinity Dial, a senior biology major from Rockwall, Texas; Ashley Glover, a senior biology and chemistry major from Stuttgart, Ark.; Crista Riggs, a senior

professional chemistry and biology major from Edmond, Okla.; Megan Scarbrough, a senior biology major from Fayetteville, Ark.; Dustin Walter, a senior biology and chemistry major from Marion, Ark.; and Rebekah Ward, senior chemistry and biology major from Little Rock, Ark.

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